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PUBLIC HEALTH REPORTS.

SUMMARY OF SANITARY REPORTS.

Status and progress of epidemics.

Asiatic cholera.—During the fortnight ending May 6, there were 87 deaths from cholera at Calcutta, twice as many during the second week of the fortnight as during the first. The board of health, however, was of the opinion that cholera could not be considered epidemic at Calcutta because the number of fatal cases was below the average of the season. All the fatal cases, except one in a person of mixed race, were among Hindus and Mohammedans, and there was no connection with the shipping or the port.

Yellow fever.—Yellow fever has been reported present in two other countries of Central America besides Panama, namely, Honduras and British Honduras—regions that have suffered rarely from outbreaks of the disease; a noteworthy fact in view of their geographical position. They do not seem to have taken a share in the epidemic of 1897–98. This exemption is more remarkable when it is remembered that in extensive prevalences neighboring South American and West Indian countries have not escaped the visitations of the disease. These coast places—ports from which cabinet woods, dyewoods, and tropical fruits are shipped—lie in the low, moist *tierra caliente*, or hot land. Two deaths were reported May 24 from Belize, the capital of British Honduras, the northernmost Central American country and next neighbor to Yucatan, Mexico, where yellow fever existed in April at Merida. Belize is a well-built city, though some of the poorer houses stand on piles.

The surrounding country is swampy and the coast is fenced in from the open sea by lines of keys. The population is mostly colored. Belize has no harbor, steamers having to anchor a mile or more from the mouth of the river Belize, on an arm of which the city is built, and work their cargo from lighters. At Puerto Cortez (also called Puerto Caballos), Honduras, a small place across the Gulf of Honduras, 150 miles south of Belize, 4 fatal cases of yellow fever were reported from May 25 to June 1.

In connection with the presence of the disease at Puerto Cortez, a telegram from Mobile, Ala., dated June 3, states that 1 case of yellow fever and 1 suspicious case arrived at that port from Puerto Cortez on board the fruit steamer *Hiram*, which was remanded to Gulf Quarantine, Ship Island. A telegram from the officer in command of that station gives the diagnosis of yellow fever in both cases from the steamer *Hiram*.

In Mexico yellow fever was officially reported to be present, during the week ending May 27, at one place only, Tierra Blanca, 50 miles from Veracruz, where there was but 1 case during the week.

In the city of Veracruz no case of yellow fever has been registered since December 29, 1904.

The exemption of Mexican ports from quarantinable disease is of increasing importance to the United States for the reason, stated in the reports of British consuls in Mexico, that the traffic of the United States, and that of Germany as well, with Mexico is constantly growing at the expense of British trade.

The only other Caribbean port where the presence of yellow fever has been recently reported is Maracaibo, the principal seaport of Venezuela, possessing a deep harbor and a large export trade, particularly in coffee and cacao. The last cases of yellow fever were reported May 4. The foreign trade of Venezuela is chiefly in the hands of Americans, British, and Germans. The exports pass through Maracaibo, arriving there from the prominent commercial towns, San Cristobal and Valera. Maracaibo is also the principal port for adjacent parts of Colombia. The few thousand head of cattle that reach Cuba and Porto Rico annually from Venezuela do not go through Maracaibo, but are sent down the Orinoco.

Bubonic plague.—In New South Wales and Queensland, Australia, there has been a recurrence of plague following a delusive free period, the affected places being for the time declared exempt.

The last case of plague in Queensland during the first outbreak was discharged March 28, and the hospital closed. No new cases, according to information, occurred to April 1. Rat hunting was actively pursued following the recovery of the last case. During the fortnight ending April 1, 1,755 rodents were destroyed (1,429 rats and 326 mice) after bacteriological examination, and four rats were found to be infected. The last pest rat was found April 21.

The final 3 cases of plague in New South Wales in the former manifestation recovered in the week ending February 25. During the week in question 394 rodents were bacteriologically examined in the Clarence River district, and 4 were found to be infected with plague. In the Richmond River district 200 were studied, but all proved free from the infection. The following week an investigation was made of the condition of 277 of these animals in the Clarence River district, with negative results. A similar result followed examination of 131 rodents during the week ending March 11. The localities of Clarence and Richmond rivers, the former one of the largest streams in Australia and navigable 50 miles to the city of Grafton by vessels drawing 10 feet of water, were declared free from plague March 14, and the bulletin issued during the prevalence of the disease was discontinued by official orders.

The only other locality in Australia where reports indicated the presence of plague at that time was Newcastle, New South Wales, at which city the American consul, in a letter dated April 13, says there were 4 cases and 1 death in March and early April, but none for ten days directly preceding his report. Newcastle, though a small city, is the terminus of a railroad, and has a good trade in the shipment of coal, which goes to Australasian ports, India, China, Siam, and even San Francisco.

The wide importance of the public health of Newcastle lies, however, in the circumstance that it is only 70 miles from Sydney, the chief naval depot of Australasia, having a population of about half a million, and connected by mail lines with Brisbane, Queensland; Noumea, New Caledonia; Suva, Fiji; Auckland and Wellington, New Zealand; and Melbourne, Victoria. There are also trading lines with Honolulu, the Solomon Islands, Tongatabu, and New Zealand ports. Apart from the New Zealand trade, steamers run from Newcastle to Iquique, Chile, where plague was reported as late as March 27.

The reawakening of plague in New South Wales affected the city of Sydney itself, the first case appearing there March 16, followed by 4 cases during the week ending April 8. The infected locality is Darling Harbor, which, with Sydney Cove, forms one of the most handsome and commodious harbor establishments in the world. In this neighborhood the plague patients either lived or worked. In one week toward the beginning of April 2,903 rats and 1,923 mice were destroyed after examination of 420 of the former and 397 of the latter. Four rats and 4 mice were found infected with plague bacilli. At Newcastle, during the week ending April 8, 4 plague patients were under treatment; 2,070 rats and 261 mice were destroyed; 667 rodents were examined in the plague laboratory, and 11 showed infection.

In Queensland the hospital, closed March 28, had to be reopened. To date of April 8, 23 cases had occurred, the first case only four days after the closure of the hospital in the person of a resident of the city employed in a shop in Fortitude Valley. The patient was removed to Colmslie Plague Hospital two days later.

Rat catching was vigorously continued during the three weeks covered by reports received for the period subsequent to the reappearance of the disease; 1,508 rats and 235 mice were destroyed; 808 rats and 222 mice were examined; and, between April 6 and 15, 3 infected rats were found. The infected rats came from a warehouse, dining rooms, and a flour mill.

A second death from plague occurred at Tokyo, Japan, May 10, a previous death having taken place April 18. The presence of plague in Tokyo has not the same importance for the shipping that it would have at certain other Japanese ports for the reason that there is very little depth of water in the bay and river and large vessels do not go nearer than 5 miles to the city.

One case of plague was declared March 11 at Penang, a British settlement in the Straits of Malacca, trading chiefly with Singapore, Java, Sumatra, and the Malay Peninsula.

At Hongkong, a Chinaman just arrived from Canton died of plague the last week in March, and there were two other fatal cases among Chinamen the following week.

Siam, where 14 deaths from plague were reported in December and January, developed sporadic cases in April at Bangkok, a port somewhat off the world routes, but having land connections with Korat by a railroad opened in 1900 and sea traffic with Singapore (805 miles) and Saigon, Annam (640 miles).

It is reported that during the week ending April 6 there were no cases of plague on the island of Mauritius, where in March a single case was reported following, after an interval of three months, a series of 700 cases extending over a period of two years.

At Cebu, Philippine Islands, 3 cases of plague occurred during the week ending April 22, the last previous cases, 5 fatal ones, having taken place between January 1 and March 31. At Manila there were 24 cases of plague and 21 deaths from December 4 to April 29, the date of the last case.

GENERAL SANITARY INFORMATION.

French and Americans in the Canal Zone.—A comparison of the health conditions of the French laborers at Panama during the first year of their work, 1881, with prevailing health conditions in the Canal Zone is made in a report, dated April 21, 1905, of the chief sanitary officer. There were 9,000 employees on the rolls on the last of March, with 301 admissions to hospital during the month, 11 deaths, and 153 remaining sick at the conclusion of the month, giving yearly an admission rate of 401.28, a constant sick rate of 17, and a death rate of 14.66 per mille.

Under the French the admission rate for the first year was 630.38, and the death rate 66.80 per mille. An extension throughout the year of the American rates for March would give 3,612 cases of sickness and 132 deaths, whereas, for the same number of men and the same length of time, the French had 5,850 men taken sick, with 620 deaths.

Rats and plague.—The theory that the Norway or brown rat prevents the spread of plague by destroying the long-tailed rat varieties is advanced by Lieut. Col. Bruce Skinner in an article contributed to the British Medical Journal, May 6, 1905. An examination of the history and march of epidemics and the geographical distribution of rats leads the writer to the conclusion that the long-tailed varieties are the propagators of the disease; that their habitat corresponds with the endemic areas of bubonic plague, and their occasional geographical range to the regions visited by epidemics. The distribution of rats is given as follows:

The old English or long-tailed rat (*Mus rattus*) is world-wide in its distribution. It may be black, brown, rust-colored, or even gray in color. No reliance, however, can be placed on the color of rats for specific distinction. The brown or Norway rat (*Mus decumanus*) is larger than the long-tailed rat, as well as stronger and more ferocious. It is usually light-brown in color and possesses two distinguishing characters—a tail never longer than the body, and ears which, when bent over, do not reach farther than the margin of the eye. It keeps in the lower parts of buildings, while the long-tailed rat is inclined to mount to the upper stories, and has even been known to nest in trees.

It is probable that the Norway rat, so called perhaps from its having been introduced into the British Isles on Norwegian vessels, is a native of Asia. It invaded Europe and North America in the eighteenth century and subsequently appeared in the West Indies and South America. It is found in the ports of India. From their coloring, long-tailed rats are sometimes mistaken for the Norway rat. The Egyptian rat (*M. alexandrinus*), a brown long-tailed variety whose native abode extends from North Africa through India to Burma, often gives rise to this confusion. Colonel Skinner suggests that a study be made with a view to determine whether the propagation of the Norway rat, whose susceptibility to plague is considered slight or lacking, should not be encouraged with a view to exterminating the long-tailed rat, against which it is a successful antagonist.

UNITED STATES.

[Reports to the Surgeon-General Public Health and Marine-Hospital Service.]

Yellow fever on steamship Hiram at Mobile from Puerto Cortez; vessel remanded to Ship Island.

MOBILE, ALA., *June 3, 1905.*

GLENNAN, *Acting Surgeon-General, Washington:*

Steamship *Hiram*, from Cortez; 1 yellow fever, 1 suspicious; remanded Ship Island.

GOLDTHWAITE, *Health Officer.*

BILOXI, MISS., *June 5, 1905.*

WYMAN, *Washington:*

Steamer *Hiram* arrived June 3 from Puerto Cortez via Mobile quarantine. Diagnosis yellow fever, 2 cases, is confirmed.

WILLE.